Maricopa County
News Release

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Flu Update for Maricopa County

Phoenix -- The Maricopa County Department of Public Health is working with community partners to spread information about influenza. This year's flu season has arrived early and is causing people concern, but there are measures the public can take to protect themselves.

Knowing when you have the flu is the first step. If you are suddenly experiencing fever, headache, general aches and pains, extreme fatigue and exhaustion, and severe coughing, chances are you have the flu. If, however, your symptoms have come on slowly and include stuffy nose, congestion, sneezing and sore throat without a fever over 100 degrees, you more likely have a common cold, rather than the flu. Please remember that your medical provider is your best source for advise.

Two flu strains present in the community are Panama and Fujian. Flu symptoms have been more severe this year for children under 14. The elderly and persons with chronic illnesses are also at risk.

There are still some providers that have vaccine in Maricopa County, and high-risk people are encouraged to receive a flu shot if they have not already.

For information on where to get flu shots, go to http://www.cir.org, or call (602) 263-8856. Information is also available in today's Arizona Republic and on http://azcentral.com. Individuals at high risk include:
People over 50 years of age.
Adults and children with a chronic disease like diabetes or chronic disorders of the lungs and heart.
Anyone whose immune system is weakened because of HIV/AIDS or other diseases that effect the immune system.
Anyone 6 months to 18 years of age on long-term aspirin treatments.
Residents of nursing homes and other long-term care facilities.
Women who will be in the second or third trimester of pregnancy during the flu season.
Physicians, nurses, family members, child-care workers or anyone coming in close contact with people at risk of serious influenza.
Parents of otherwise healthy children, ages 6 to 23 months, should discuss getting a flu shot for those children with their health care provider.

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An alternative for healthy individuals 5 to 49 years old is the Flu Mist vaccine, which is inhaled nasally, and is available. For more information on Flu Mist, please log on to http://www.flumist.com

The most important way you can protect yourself is to take extra care with your personal hygiene. Good hand washing is imperative, as well as covering your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing and sneezing, immediately throwing away used tissues, and staying home from school or work when you are sick.

Public Health, with cooperation from local healthcare providers, conducts close surveillance for influenza so they can track when the flu arrives and what type is going around, and so they can monitor the flu's seasonal trends and compare those trends to previous years. Because more people are aware of influenza this year, more people are being tested and seeing healthcare providers. This gives Public Health more information on the numbers of people with the disease, and allows health officials to closely monitor the disease and accurately compare it with previous years.

Influenza strikes every winter and usually causes illness for two or three months. The Maricopa County Department of Public Health is now reporting 370 confirmed cases of influenza, and 4 deaths in which influenza may have played a role, two in elderly people and two in children. These numbers will be updated weekly. So far, the numbers of people with influenza in Maricopa County is similar to previous years; Maricopa County has not reached epidemic levels of influenza this season.

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